



Coffee Break Training - Fire Prevention and Public Education

Becoming a Community Risk-Reduction Champion

No. FM-2011-1 May 12, 2011

Learning Objective: The student shall be able to identify the role of a risk-reduction champion.

Community risk reduction can best be defined as measures taken by a community to reduce the impact of risk. Educating the public, passing laws pertaining to fire safety, and enforcing fire codes have been used since colonial days to manage fire risk. In recent years, the role of emergency services has extended beyond just fire risk to a more comprehensive all-hazard approach. Historically in the United States, prevention activities have not been embraced by emergency responders who believe they were hired to fight fires and not prevent them. However, in times of limited resources, how we do business is being questioned. Firefighting in many communities is a rare event and medical emergencies have become the predominant function. More emphasis is being placed on not only responding to an emergency, but what can be done to prevent the incident in the first place or once it has occurred how the impact can be reduced.



A champion is found at the center of every successful risk reduction effort.

At this time there is a strong focus on integrating front line operations personnel into managing and reducing risk in the community. This concept has been used very successfully in other countries, in some cases significantly reducing fire fatalities and is being pilot tested across the United States. Your help is needed to become a champion in community risk reduction. The champion is a strategist who

- helps create and support risk reduction initiatives;
- leads the process of identifying and prioritizing risk to community at the station level;
- supports those who are involved actively in the on-going risk reduction process; and
- works strategically to mitigate targeted risks and helps to propose public policies that support risk reduction.

When residents and decisionmakers understand existing and potential risks they are better prepared to partner with emergency services to address challenges. While there are many benefits associated with safer communities, the process of attaining success is not as easy as it sounds. Potential challenges may include resistance within the organization to risk-reduction initiatives, lack of time, lack of formal authority to fulfill a leadership role, and lack of experience in risk reduction.

By becoming a risk-reduction champion you have the opportunity to engage the community and use your legitimate authority to create a safer and healthier community for all. Remember—when the community is safer, so are our emergency responders.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). *Leadership Strategies in Community Risk Reduction*, August 2010.

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